

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 595

CS 213 663

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TITLE Dynamics of Change: Speculation on the Forthcoming Model of Response to Literature.
PUB DATE Dec 92
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (42nd, San Antonio, TX, December 2-5, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Trends; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Literature Appreciation; Literature Reviews; Metaphors; *Models; *Reader Response; *Reader Text Relationship; *Reading Research
IDENTIFIERS Research Trends; *Response to Literature

ABSTRACT

In what appear to be grand saccadic leaps, research on reader response has turned first, at the beginning of the century, to the external reality of the text; then to the internal reality of the reader; and finally to the movement of the response process itself. Three metaphors derive from the three successive research orientations: from the text-based model comes the mechanistic metaphor; from the reader-based model emerges the socio-political metaphor; and from the response-based model comes the organic metaphor. In this paper, a brief description of each metaphor as it emerges from its respective research period is given, followed by remarks on its application to the overall conceptual changes in research and a mention of its strengths and limitations. The dynamics of change across these metaphors is then elucidated, and a fourth metaphor, the holonomic, is offered for speculation. This new model or metaphor emphasizes the underlying unity of seemingly disparate elements. Unlike the preceding metaphors, the holonomic metaphor of response to literature emphasizes deep rather than surface structure. This proposed holonomic model is not only internally consistent with the previous dynamics of change, it is also congruent with the predictions of researchers concerning future directions which will emphasize collaboration and self-actualization. The quest for relevance and accuracy in response research from the mechanistic to the holonomic metaphor provides compelling evidence of the extraordinary wisdom, power, and beauty of human consciousness. (Twenty-five references are attached.) (RS)

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Dynamics of Change

DYNAMICS OF CHANGE: SPECULATION ON THE FORTHCOMING MODEL
OF RESPONSE TO LITERATURE

by

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INTRODUCTION

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Morgan (1989), in his Images of organizations, proposes that "metaphor is central to the way we organize and understand our world". Further, he continues, "metaphors are not only interpretive constructs or ways of seeing; they also provide frameworks for action." As detailed in Eberdt (1990), predominant research conceptions of response to literature have moved from a focus on the text (1912-39) to the reader (1940-69) to the response process (1970-90). Transposing these perspectives into three metaphors, this paper explores the underlying dynamics of change in order to provide speculation on a forthcoming model of response.

The metaphors derive from the three successive research orientations. From the text-based model comes the mechanistic metaphor or perspective; from the reader-based model emerges the socio-political metaphor; and

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from the response-based model comes the organic metaphor. A brief description of each metaphor as it emerges from its respective research period will be followed by its application to the overall conceptual changes in research and mention will be made of its strengths and limitations. Finally, dynamics of change across these first three metaphors or models will be elucidated and a fourth metaphor, the holonomic, will be offered for speculation.

MECHANISTIC METAPHOR

As defined by Purves and Beach (1972), research on response to literature begins with studies which focus on the text: the importance of the external reality (e.g., Abbott & Trabue, 1921; Patrick, 1939). The emphasis is on the difference or dividing line between "out there" and "in here". From this perspective, there is only one best interpretation of a poem. A beautiful poem is beautiful in all contexts and a poor poem never redeems itself, no matter who does the reading or under what conditions. From this focus on the text and external reality emerges the mechanistic metaphor in which all values are perceived to have fixed context-free qualities. Issues as being either good or bad, right or wrong. Because both the idiosyncratic nature of personalities as well as varying contextual

constraints are completely disregarded, this metaphor conceives of the universe and people as machine-like.

Applying the mechanistic metaphor to changing research conceptions reveals a succession of unrelated stages from a focus on the text, to a concern with the reader and finally to a consideration of the response process itself. These descriptions of separate, monolithic stages convey the clarity offered through mechanistic simplification. The metaphor suggests a straightforward path toward a predetermined goal unhampered by contextual constraints. However, a limitation of this metaphor is its actual disempowerment of the individual. Conceptual change, regarded through the lens of this metaphor, takes the form of unpredictable revolution. Because it does not account for varying contextual conditions, change seems to act upon us, rather than emerging gradually from within us. Hence we are powerless against the seemingly unpredictable, external forces which shape our environment.

SOCIAL-POLITICAL METAPHOR

The research focus on the text is followed by a focus on the reader. This perspective is exemplified in studies by Allport and Lepkin (1943) and Berelson (1942). In these studies, reading is above all a social process. The

reader, a social being, assimilates textual information and takes the resulting ideas back into society. From this focus emerges the social-political metaphor which emphasizes the underlying dynamics of collective meaning systems.

Applied to the larger view of changing research perspectives, this metaphor suggests that research conceptions constitute a culture of ideologies nested within the larger context of social, political and pedagogical conditions. For example, proponents of this perspective could explain that the text-orientation gained power during the twenties and thirties because it provided support, in the aesthetic domain, for the transition from an agricultural to industrial age: it was useful, indeed necessary to think of reality, nature and even ourselves as machine-like in order to facilitate this transition. Thus research conceptions viewed as a social-political system suggests a succession of ideologies which often but not always have overt correspondences with the societal conditions in which they are nested.

The major strength of the social-political metaphor is its challenge of cultural rationality. Stan Straw (1990) argues that the continuing importance placed on the economic value of functional literacy within society has both challenged existing schooling practices and succeeded in

keeping them under constant attack. A realization of the Sysiphean punishment which is both assigned to, and often accepted by, the educational system suggests that regardless of what teachers and researchers do, the constant of criticizing our educational system prevails. This is a useful insight. However, a limitation of this metaphor concerns the belief that values emerge **solely** from the surrounding cultural context. In thinking thus, the social-political metaphor may be creating rather than documenting these links.

ORGANIC METAPHOR

The third research focus, after the text- and the reader-focus is the transactive or organic focus of Louise Rosenblatt. This perspective focuses on the fluid movement between separate elements in the environment: the reader, the context and the text. For example, Beach (1972) explores the ways in which response is influenced by various modes and contexts.

Kintgen (1985), another researcher of this perspective, observes:

It is never clear whether a particular statement reflects knowledge of the work or conception of the rhetorical situation . . . a poem may refer to anything past, present or future, real or imaginary, and most good poems exist in a mode that makes these terms seem inadequate. (p. 135)

Applying this metaphor to the changing research conceptions presents

a moving picture of conflicting orientations or ideologies which fluctuate in and out of existence:

(in) a continual dance of recreation and annihilation of (what appears to be) mass changing to energy and energy changing to mass. Transient forms sparkle in and out of existence creating a never-ending, forever-new reality. (Zukav, 1979, p. 179)

For example, certain elements seem to appear only for an instant: the use of nonsense syllables (Roblee and Washburn, 1912) and the documentation of readers' laughter at their "misreadings" (Pickford, 1935). Other elements, such as the response-oriented elements of this early study (Pickford, 1935) are given life in the Vergara (1946) study and expanded full-blown in the response-oriented research of the seventies (e.g. Beach, 1972; Silkey & Purves, 1973). During the eighties, these ideas seem to be on the wane and a new strand - the studies which focus on extended writing as a means of response (e.g. Crowhurst & Kooy, 1986; Harste, 1986)--seems to be growing at a faster rate. However, it is important to remember that, within the organic metaphor, these elements are always of more worth when they are visible, rather than invisible; proliferating, rather than diminishing.

The strength of the organic metaphor is its comforting emphasis on visible growth and rational evolution of the surrounding culture. Indeed, the

focus on maximal reading ability in this model is linked with the promise of greater economic prosperity. The organic metaphor thus encourages the ideology that measurable visible growth is irrefutably beneficial. An important weakness of this metaphor, however, is the implicit fear of impending decay or annihilation; it places a priority on the visible, physical world. The question arises as to whether the organic model of response is the final word.

SPECULATION ON A FUTURE DIRECTION

Straw and Bogdan (1990) propose that the "communication model", which has not been seriously questioned "prior to the past twenty years" has recently been replaced by an actualization model, in which "what drives each of the (possible) readings is a need in the reader to fulfil or actualize his or her own purposes" (p. 4).

Further, educators such as Straw and Bogdan (1990), Hunt (1990), Froese (1990) and Johnson (1988) predict a movement towards holism and collaboration between formerly disparate areas. I propose that these suggestions of a new model are not mere conjecture, but that they are supported by the internal logic of the dynamics of change across the previously-discussed metaphors.

DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

Gersick (1991) suggests a punctuated equilibrium paradigm which derives from the thinking of theorists in five areas: adult development (Levinson, 1978), group dynamics (Gersick, 1988), organizational behavior (Tushman and Romanelli, 1985), scientific change (Kuhn, 1970) and behavior of living organisms (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984). This paradigm suggests that change takes the form of a long periods of equilibrium punctuated by overt revolution. Further, as Gersick explains, even though change appears to be a virtual gestalt switch, there are large areas of overlaps between succeeding models.

Applying this paradigm to the shift in research conceptions from the focus on the text to the focus on the reader, the differences seem obvious. The move has been from external to internal reality. In addition, the focus on the text implies a context-free environment whereas the focus on the reader takes into consideration the underlying systems of relations between text, reader and context. However, one senses that there must be important similarities or, as Bersick terms them, areas of overlap, as well. Indeed, this is the case. As detailed in Eberdt (1990), both the text and the reader orientations accept the hypotheses that readers actively construct meaning; that response to literature has ethical and moral importance; that

there are qualitative differences among responses; and that there are better as well as poorer responses. However, the text-focus proposes that it is the text which fixes the amorphous and fluid response of the reader, whereas the reader-focus proposes that it is the reader who fixes the fluid reality of the text. The dynamic of change from the text- to the reader-focus could thus be considered an inversion. The locus of meaning or point of departure, which is also the endpoint in these models, has merely changed from external to internal reality; from objectivity to subjectivity; from the text, to the reader.

Further it seems logical that once both orientations had attained successive pre-eminence in the research, some sort of synthesis would follow. Indeed, Rosenblatt's (1938; 1978) organic orientation does acknowledge the importance of features such as qualitative differences in response, the ethical and moral importance of reading and the reader's active construction of meaning. This metaphor in effect unites the text and reader emphases in its insistence on both the reality of the external world of the text as well as the internal world of the reader in the creation of meaning. Further, the organic model takes an additional step in positing a different point of emphasis outside the bounds of the previous models. It is not the external reality of the text, nor the internal reality of the reader but,

instead, the dynamic space between the text and the reader which is emphasized.

Since the dynamics of this conceptual change seem to involve synthesis, inversion and a new point of emphasis outside the boundary of the previous metaphor, it would follow that the forthcoming metaphor would be an inversion of Rosenblatt's transactive model. But what could this inversion possibly look like? Following the examples of several prominent response theorists (Bleich, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978; and DeBeaugrande, 1988), it seems sensible to turn, as they do, to the area of theoretical physics for possible clues.

HOLONOMIC METAPHOR

The theory of holonomy, proposed by theoretical physicist David Bohm (1986, 1987), provides some ideas about what such an inversion would look like. Although this theory has only recently come to the fore, it has a long conceptual history, beginning in 1714 with von Leibniz's proposal that a metaphysical reality generates the material universe and that space, time, mass and motion are intellectual constructs (Wilber, 1982). In 1969, Pribram's research provided evidence for Lashley's suggestion that "the information (in the brain) is enfolded over the whole" (Bohm, 1987, p.

198). This phenomenon is analogous to the functioning of an optical hologram which was first constructed using Leibniz's calculus in 1965. Any piece of the hologram has the ability to reconstruct an entire view of the original image. In 1971, Bohm proposed that the organization of the universe may be holographic.

For purpose of the present discussion, the meaning of the term, *holonomy* (and there are many which emphasize different aspects of the concept), is derived from Ravn's (1987) definition for the social sciences and is described as "the general principles of dynamic orders whose part contain information about the whole" (p. 5). Thus, the holonomic model or metaphor emphasizes the underlying unity of seemingly separate elements. Unlike the preceding metaphors, the holonomic metaphor of response to literature emphasizes deep rather than surface structure. Wholeness, and not fluidness between separate entities as in the organic metaphor, is thus the original state in the holonomic metaphor. The organic metaphor conceives of the reader and the text as two originally separate elements which come together in a dynamic union. The holonomic metaphor reverses this idea in suggesting that in the reading situation, inherently united elements take form only as they disengage, one appearing to become the reader and the other, the text.

It is important to understand that, consistent with the dynamics of change across previous metaphors, the holonomic metaphor is the larger circle within which the preceding metaphors are successively nested. The holonomic metaphor merely expands the circle of perception, and in doing so, acknowledges the unique usefulness of each of the previous metaphors. Further, the holonomic metaphor, unlike the organic, does not prioritize the visible at the expense of the invisible. It conceives of space not as empty, but as a plenitude of possibilities.

When this metaphor is applied to the research conceptions of response to literature, like the organic metaphor, it considers them as a whole. However, it focuses not only on the research accomplishments but also on its apparent gaps or silences. Sample research explorations deriving from the holonomic model are as follows. First, as concerns the text: the use of hypertext which blurs distinctions between reader(s), author(s), and text(s) (Bolter, 1991); consideration of the world as text (and response as critical thinking). Second, as concerns individual readers: physiological as well as emotional and intellectual evidences of response; the facilitative role of humour as well as effort in the process of responding; the variety of different possible perspectives adopted by the same reader in many different contexts; the interchangeable roles of reader-author and

researcher-subject. Third, as concerns groups of readers: collaborative as well as individual responses; developmental, gender and reader-writer similarities as well as differences: cross-cultural research which focuses on oral as well as written skills in communicating response, thus bridging the gap between oral and literate cultures; and finally, perhaps going beyond language and using images to convey responses or to which to respond. It should be noted that some of these directions are already in progress and can thus be considered to fall within the area of overlap between Rosenblatt's transactional model and the forthcoming holonomic model.

This proposed holonomic model is not only internally consistent with the previous dynamics of change, it is also congruent with the predictions of researchers Johnson (1988), Hunt (1990) and Straw and Bogdan (1990) concerning future directions which will emphasize collaboration and self-actualization. However, its emphasis on underlying wholeness provides a link between two seemingly-unrelated predictions of Straw and Bogdan (1990). The holonomic model provides the explanation that self-actualization is achieved only through collaboration. Finally, a major strength of the proposed metaphor is its external utility in the belief that wholeness is inherent, natural and inevitable. It thus facilitates acceptance and understanding rather than fear and judgment of other individuals,

nationalities and values. Its weaknesses are that it could be considered idealistic and too abstract to be practical.

CONCLUSION

In what appear to be grand saccadic leaps, the research gaze has turned first, at the beginning of the century to the external reality of the text; then to the internal reality of the reader; and finally, to the moment of the response process itself. The quest for relevance and accuracy in response research from the mechanistic to the holonomic metaphor provides compelling evidence of the extraordinary wisdom, power and beauty of human consciousness.

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